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RELOCATION OF FARM FAMILIES DISPLACED BY
THE DEFENSE PROGRAM

In all parts of the country, but particularly in the Southeast and the Middle West, military and industrial defense projects are taking over land which last year was farmed by American families. By March 1, 1941, more than a million acres had actually been acquired by the Army, and the acquisition of nearly 4 million more acres was under way, with funds already authorized by Congress.

The most conservative estimate gives 6,409 as the number of families displaced so far by the defense program. As the program grows, the number of families who must look for new homes is bound to grow in proportion.

The bulk of the land purchased to date, about three-quarters of the total acreage, is to be used for military cantonments, maneuver areas, bombing fields, anti-aircraft firing ranges -- to build new Army training camps or to add land to old ones. By far the greater part of the land for Army camps is in the Southeastern part of the country, in the states of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee. It is estimated that about half of the land being taken over for military purposes is in farms, and the remainder in timber, cut-over land, and range land.

Other huge tracts are being bought as locations for defense industries to manufacture gunpowder and TNT, and to load these explosives into shells. These industries, manufacturing and handling tons of highly explosive material, need wide "shelter belts" around their plants to minimize the risk of dangerous explosions. To date, more than 228,000 acres have been bought for industrial sites, nearly all of them in the Middle Western states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri. For the most part this land is in well-developed farming communities. One site in Illinois is located on some of the best farm land in the country.

The most immediate effect of these extensive land acquisitions on farm people is the displacement of the 6,000 or more families that have had to give up their farms and homes. Even those who are able to find new places often add to the problem in so doing. An owner-operator able to buy or lease a new farm may displace one or more tenant families who in turn find it difficult to find another place to work.

Where new defense industries arise, some temporary compensation is provided in the increased employment brought into the area. The most serious displacement problems of the present, however, have occurred where training and maneuver areas are taken over and virtually no new employment results. Those who are displaced simply have to take what they can get on other farms, and that is often nothing at all.

Whereas owners at least get paid for their equity in the land, the tenant or laborer gets nothing. He is just out. And it is in the South, where land is already overcrowded and where tenancy is highest, that many of these areas are located. Most of the tenant families in the purchased areas did not find out that they would have to leave their farms until November, 1940, in many cases after the good farms and many poor ones had been rented for the new crop year. Displacement in such cases, except

for relief and rehabilitation aids that are provided, simply adds to the burden of landless farm people that the Nation has already found to be a national problem.

In addition to the pressing needs of farm people uprooted by the physical requirements of the defense program, long-range effects of the defense program require planning and study if more serious after-effects are to be minimized. Land prices have gone up, as many seek farms and there are few to be had. Where industries are being built, the industrial workers can often afford to rent farmhouses for more money than the ordinary farm tenant can pay for the whole farm. Farmers able to get defense industrial employment are induced to leave their farms, except as a place to live, so that when the emergency is over they may be confronted with a deteriorated farm and a sudden deflation in values and markets at the same time. Construction work which will last only a short time has served the needs of many who before long will be added to the landless, jobless farm workers needing assistance.

Nearly all the families who have had to move have needed some help in finding a new home, in moving themselves and their belongings out of the purchase areas, in building their lives and businesses anew. Left stranded by government action, the farmers have appealed to the government to help them get back on the land and in a position again to earn their own living.

No agency was delegated as such to assume that obligation, but the Department of Agriculture, accustomed to dealing with farmers and their problems, naturally took up the job of helping the displaced families. Within the Department, the Farm Security Administration has been the principal relocation agency, for three main reasons: First, because so many of the displaced families were low-income farm people, with whom FSA is directly concerned; second, because many of the types of help needed by the families were already part of the FSA loan and grant programs; and third, because Farm Security had the necessary county personnel, trained in reestablishing farm families through five years of resettlement and rehabilitation. In solving local problems, of course, other agencies, both agricultural and welfare, have helped in the relocation work; but the chief responsibility for the national relocation problem has fallen on FSA's shoulders.

Probably the clearest picture of the problems involved in displacement and the relocation measures being taken by Farm Security and other agencies, can be obtained by examining in detail two areas: one where the problem is simply that of displacement, and a second area where displacement and new employment opportunities exist side by side.

Hinesville, Georgia

The Hinesville project is a characteristic example of defense displacement and relocation activities, for three reasons: (1) all types of farmers, owners, renters, and laborers were displaced; (2) displacement is immediate and permanent--and there are no industries being developed

to provide work for the displaced farmers; (3) at Hinesville the Farm Security Administration has worked out and put into action a long and varied list of relocation aids.

Near Hinesville, in southeastern Georgia 40 miles south of Savannah, the War Department is acquiring 360,000 acres of land in Liberty, Bryan, and Long Counties. The area was chosen for an anti-aircraft firing-range, based on Camp Stewart. Purchase of the area began last fall, and the original evacuation date for 215,000 acres was set for March 1, 1941. Later this date was revised, and the area will now be taken over piecemeal, with final occupancy delayed until October.

A survey of the area, made by FSA in cooperation with other agricultural agencies, showed that in late 1940 a total of 713 families--nearly half of them Negro--were living on the land to be purchased. Included in the survey were 298 owner-operators, 40 cash renters, 75 sharecroppers, and 143 farm laborers. The rest were non-farm families--shopkeepers, squatters, and people working in nearby towns.

Landowners, tenants, laborers, and non-farm people--each of these groups faces special problems in trying to get relocated, as the following paragraphs will show. But all the families in the area face certain common problems. All of them have to find new homes, and all have to find some method of moving there. In addition, it must be borne in mind that no sharp lines divide these groups from each other. Owners with little or no equity in their farms are, if anything, less well off than the more prosperous tenants, and the poorest tenants lead lives fully as hard as most of the farm labor group.

The survey showed 158 white and 140 Negro owner-operators living on the area. Many of the white families had been living comfortably on the income from their farms. Some of them had large holdings of turpentine trees. Others had large cultivated tracts--one man had 100 acres in a single cornfield. Still others have specialty crops as their annual source of cash--two owners had been doing a thriving honey business. The Negro landowners were generally poor, an inherited home their only hold on security.

Many of the landowner families, as soon as they learned that their farms were being bought, decided to buy or rent another farm. But immediately they ran into difficulties. For one thing, even though land purchasing methods have been "streamlined" and speeded up, it still required several months before the owners received their checks. Another trouble was that many owners had only a small equity in their farms and received but little cash from the sale. Farm land in the South is crowded anyway, and the increased demand for it forced values far above their normal levels. A fourth barrier was that the farmers had relatively little time in which to try to find new places before the spring planting season. Most of the Hinesville farmers were not sure they had to move until mid-winter, and by that time most of the available farms were already leased through 1941.

To help these owners in their struggle to obtain new farms the FSA set up a relocation office in Hinesville. Toward the beginning of November the county agents and FSA supervisors from 23 counties in southeast Georgia were asked to inform the Hinesville office whenever they heard of farms for rent or sale. The scarcity of available farms was brought into bold relief when 21 counties reported only 300 farms.

The FSA loaned farm owners the funds they needed to pay subsistence expenses and carry on farming operations until they received payment for their land. FSA farm management specialists offered technical advice needed by the farmer in his selection of a new farm.

When necessary, Farm Security has also arranged shelter for the farmer's livestock until he is able to locate a new farm. And where farmers have decided to sell or abandon their livestock and tools, FSA has spaced public sales to avoid "flooding the market."

When a displaced farm owner locates a farm and moves to it, the FSA relocation office notifies the Farm Security supervisor in the county in which the displaced farmer has settled. The supervisor then visits the farmer, talks over his farm problems with him, helps him become acquainted in the new neighborhood, and, if necessary, offers him the farm aids available under the regular FSA rehabilitation program. These include help in planning farm work along modern and efficient lines, loans for the tools and livestock necessary to carry on modern farming operations, and aid in adjusting debts down to a point that is within the farmer's ability to pay.

The 115 renters and sharecroppers in the Hinesville area faced all the problems confronting the land-owners and a few more besides. The land-owner could usually expect to receive at least a little cash from the sale of his land. The tenant receives none at all. Moreover the land-owner was at least used to a semi-independent way of living. The tenant was not. What little security he had came from his friendly relationship with the leaders of the community. This was based on a lifetime of acquaintance. It could not be easily re-established in a strange neighborhood.

The most important aid which the tenants have received has been in the form of cash grants. These grants are made for actual moving expenses and for subsistence expenses--food, clothing, rent--until the family can get re-established on a new farm. In addition the FSA offered the renter the same types of aid received by the landlord: A list of available farms, technical advice in determining the value of a new farm, and, after location on a new farm, regular rehabilitation aids. But because so many of the renters had so little equipment or cash, and because farms available for renting were even harder to find than farms for sale, this type of FSA help did not mean as much to the renter as it did to the land-owner.

For this reason the FSA sought to bring further help to the displaced Hinesville farmers, and particularly the renters, through the purchase of raw land and the development of new farms and new farming opportunities.

As a means of developing these new farmsteads the FSA set up the "Hinesville Relocation Corporation", a non-profit association organized under Georgia laws with the power to buy, sell, and lease land and carry on a variety of farming enterprises. With the aid of money borrowed from the FSA, this corporation has purchased 19,000 acres of land near Hazelhurst, in nearby Jeff Davis County, Georgia. Temporary houses have been erected on this tract--pre-fabricated in sections at a mill, and shipped to the site where they were assembled at the rate of "a home an hour."

On this land temporary homes can be provided for 125 families, most of them tenants, who have no place to go. Hinesville families who are unable to locate new farms immediately are now moving into these temporary homes. During the coming year some of the families will probably be able to rent or buy farms in the surrounding area. Those who stay will be given jobs clearing and developing the land. Eventually the 19,000 acres will be divided into farms, new homes and barns will be erected on the new farms, and a farming community will be developed. Present plans also contemplate the carrying on of turpentine operations on a portion of the tract.

Not only will the Hazelhurst development provide permanent homes for a large number of the displaced families but it will also help them retain something they value just as highly, the friendships built up and cemented through years of close relations in the past. The Hazelhurst community will do what no other type of aid could do; help a community of people, who are accustomed to living together, move together to a new location.

The 143 displaced farm laborers at Hinesville are faced with still different problems. They receive no returns from the sale of land and, in addition, they have very few ties to the land or to farming in general. They have no tools, no livestock, and few possessions. For this reason many of these families quickly sought and obtained temporary jobs in the construction of the soldiers' quarters at Camp Stewart.

What these workers will do when construction of the camp is completed is not always clear or certain. FSA can give them subsistence grants, can help them find jobs, and if they are anxious to become full-time farmers FSA can help them at Hazelhurst or some similar development. It is quite possible, however, that the wages received in construction work at Camp Stewart may remove all desire for farm work until that source of income is ended.

Some of the non-farm people present the most difficult relocation problems of all. In many cases, of course, their livelihood is not affected, and consequently the relocation problem can be solved by a cash grant to defray expenses of moving. But many of these people are living on small pensions or relief checks, or scraping together a living by getting occasional work near their homes. To remove them from their homes is to take away from them the one prop which maintained them above the starvation line, the only vestige of security they had in the world. Many of the non-farm people should be welfare cases, but most Southern states have enough trouble supporting the families already on their relief rolls,

without taking on scores of new cases. Farm Security can and does help the non-farm families to move, and keeps them going by month-to-month subsistence grants; but nothing can be done for them on a permanent basis short of a permanent increase in employment opportunities which this type of defense project does not supply, and an adequate provision of relief money for the unemployables.

It is worth emphasizing again that there are many other areas like Hinesville, with similar problems and similar measures put into effect by the Farm Security Administration. What has been said above about the families at Hinesville could be repeated again and again in the other military purchase areas.

Wilmington, Illinois

The defense area near Wilmington, Illinois represents still a different type of defense project. Here, while a great deal of displacement is taking place, large-scale opportunities for employment are also being created. In general, the displacement problem is temporarily softened by the large-scale demand for labor, while the problems resulting from a tremendous influx of people exist in full force.

Briefly, the development of the Wilmington problem, to date, is this: On some of the best corn land in the U. S., a shell-loading plant, known as the Ellwood Ordnance Plant, and a powder and TNT plant called the Kankakee Ordnance Plant, are being erected. Approximately 45,000 acres are required for these two plants and 300 families are being displaced.

Because many of the farmers in the area were in good financial condition and because defense employment temporarily solved the problem of some of the tenant farmers, FSA aid has not yet been needed to any great extent in the Wilmington area. However, land values have skyrocketed in the area, and the mechanization that has taken place during the past decade had already decreased the need for farm tenants, so Farm Security expects that its aid will be sorely needed before all the families from the Wilmington area are relocated. To this end FSA has 5,000 acres of farm land under option and is optioning additional land which can be purchased and subdivided into farmsteads for families unable to find permanent relocations.

A report of the FSA regional office made on February 27, 1941, concerning the Wilmington area, summarized relocation progress as follows: "300 farm families affected, 150 owners and 150 tenants. 52 owners have relocated by purchasing farms. 50 tenants have relocated by renting farms. 60 have been employed in defense industries. 36 have retired on own funds. Five retired on Social Security payments. 97 unable as yet to relocate. So far FSA has not been called upon to give temporary aid except to furnish information on available farms for rent and available houses for temporary shelter."

At Wilmington, as in most of the Middle Western defense areas, secondary displacement has been an important factor--just how important

it is impossible to judge. Many prosperous farmers have been displaced. They have the resources to purchase another farm immediately, and when they do, one or more additional farm families are displaced. Often a large operator, who buys another large farm with the money paid him for his old farm, displaces several tenants at a time. These farmers in turn try to buy or rent other farms, and other farmers are displaced farther down the line. The FSA supervisor in one Middle Western area reported that one farmer had displaced eight others; the first farmer, displaced from the defense area, bought a farm, the man whose farm was bought purchased another, the third man went and displaced a fourth, and so on to the eighth power. Not only does this mean disturbance for a large number of families, but often the family finally displaced is removed from the center of assistance and it is difficult to trace him or for him to get assistance he needs. His chances of being forced into landless migrancy are thus multiplied.

In Wilmington, as in other areas where members of the displaced families can get jobs on defense work, the real relocation job comes when the temporary employment is ended and the families want to go back to farming. Relocation is an emergency task, but that does not mean that it is all on an immediate basis. To help families find new homes on the land, where they can be permanently self-supporting, long-range planning is needed. The Farm Security Administration is really doing two things at once: alleviating immediate distress and planning for the permanent rehabilitation of the displaced families.

Summary of FSA Aid

The following list shows briefly the types of relocation aid which the Farm Security Administration offers to families displaced from defense areas:

1. Survey of the defense area, to determine just how many families are living there and what assistance they will need. This means finding out the actual number of farm families to be displaced and what their plans are for the coming crop year. It means assessing the volume of surplus farm labor among members of low-income farm families in the area, and the extent of wintertime unemployment among low-income families. It also means keeping tabs on the number of farms and amount of acreage being vacated or in prospect of being under manned during the coming cropping season.

2. Help in finding a new home, through--

- (a) Collecting in a central "relocation office" a list of farms and homes available in nearby counties, for sale or rent. The office thus acts as a kind of "go-between," bringing together the people who want to rent or buy, and the people who have farms they want to lease or sell.

- (b) Buying new land, rapidly constructing temporary homes on it, and clearing the land for cultivation as in the relocation project at Hazelhurst, Georgia. This is done through State Relocation Corporations,

incorporated under the laws of the individual states, and operating under the direction of FSA officials. The Corporations have wide powers: to lease or purchase land and dispose of it; to carry on a variety of agricultural, dairying, and other enterprises; and to borrow money from the Farm Security Administration.

This direct resettlement activity has become one of the most effective ways of relocating farm people from defense areas. The long-range plan is roughly this: Some of the families who move to these temporary homes will find other places to live during the next year or so, and meanwhile they will have a place to live and paid work to do on the new project. For those families who want to stay on the new land, FSA will build permanent homes, and help the families rebuild the community they left behind in the defense area.

3. Help in moving out of the area, through special cash grants. These grants are made to those families who need the money, for actual expenses in moving themselves and their belongings from their abandoned home to their new one.

4. Help in getting started again after the family has moved, through--

- (a) Grants for subsistence expenses--food, clothing, rent, etc.
- (b) Loans to owners to tide them over until they are paid for their land.
- (c) Operating loans for families who wish to continue farming--that is, the regular rehabilitation loans which may be used for the purchase of tools, seed, fertilizer, and any other equipment needed to carry on modern balanced farming operations.
- (d) Full use of FSA's voluntary farm debt adjustment procedure.

5. Disturbance Compensation. FSA has generally urged that tenants as well as landlords should get paid for having to evacuate their homes. This has sometimes involved setting up a kind of conciliation service, which acts as an intermediary between the landlord and the tenant, and between the optioning agents and the farmers.

6. Help with livestock and equipment. For families who will continue farming, FSA supervisors arrange to board their livestock and store their equipment if there is an interval between the evacuation date and the time the family finds a new farm. For families who want to get rid of their livestock and equipment, supervisors arrange public sales jointly with others who wish to sell, thus drawing patronage from an area large enough to assure fair prices, and allowing the control necessary to keep the market from being "flooded."

7. Defense employment. FSA representatives have generally tried to get defense contractors to give priority in employment to qualified members of families displaced from defense areas.

8. Housing. Permanent houses erected by FSA in rural industrialized sections as a part of the defense housing program are located where they

can be used after the defense emergency is over. As often as possible these houses are placed on farms which previously had sub-marginal housing. In addition, the FSA is administering a program of "stop-gap" housing in areas where the need for housing is urgent but short-lived. This type of housing consists of trailers and light construction dormitories that can be moved or torn down when they are no longer needed.

9. Information to farmers on a variety of subject. In each defense area, a central office is set up to which farmers can come to get information and help. In the case of displaced families, information about employment in new defense industries is made available. Where there seems to be danger of temporary industrial employment sucking needed farm people off the land, every opportunity is taken to point out the long-term advantages of continuing efficient operation of the family's farm. This, however, is not aimed to discourage the earning of supplementary income in industry by members of the family whose services are not needed to run the farm. For all farmers in the locality, an effort is made to inform them how to take advantage of the temporary prosperity resulting from the sudden increase in demand for truck crops, dairy products, and livestock products. Wherever possible, this latter type of informational work has followed by the formation of cooperative associations to finance curb markets for vegetables and other produce, or to set up new milk routes, or maintain cold storage units.

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